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Editor's Note: This issue of China Brief includes a dual-length article from Adam Ni and Bates Gill on the “Strategic Support Force,” a branch of the Chinese armed forces whose mission areas include computer network operations, space warfare, and other emerging areas of modern warfare. Per the request of the authors, the article is being published in full in this issue, rather than being split up for sequential publication. Therefore, this issue of China Brief contains three contributors’ articles, instead of the standard four.

-- John Dotson, editor

What Derailed the U.S.-China Trade Talks?

By John Dotson

Introduction: The U.S.-China “Trade War” Since Early 2018

For over a year, the United States and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) have been engaged in a contentious trade dispute initiated by the Trump Administration over a host of alleged unfair Chinese trading practices: ranging from intellectual property theft, to industrial subsidies, to artificial barriers to market access

for U.S. and other international companies. The first shots of the “trade war” were fired in January 2018, when the Trump Administration imposed import tariffs affecting Chinese-built solar panels and washing machines ([PIIE](#), January 25, 2018). This was followed shortly thereafter by punitive tariffs imposed by the PRC on U.S.-grown sorghum ([PIIE](#), February 6, 2018). By early 2019, the escalating trade frictions had resulted in U.S.-imposed tariffs on \$250 billion in Chinese goods, across a range of sectors; with reciprocal tariffs imposed by the PRC on \$110 billion in U.S. products, with many of the duties falling in the agricultural sector ([CNBC](#), March 1).

Per the position of the U.S. side, the tariffs have been issued under the provisions of Section 301 of the *Trade Act of 1974*, which grants the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), pursuant to direction by the U.S. President, authorities to “impose duties or other import restrictions on the goods of, [and] fees or restrictions on the services of, such foreign country” as may be conducting trade practices that “violate [or are] inconsistent with the provisions of... any trade agreement, or [which are] unjustifiable and [impose] burdens or restrict[ions on] United States commerce.” [1] The trade disputes have also occurred against the backdrop of a more assertive U.S. position regarding “China’s continued embrace of a state-led, mercantilist approach to the economy and trade,” and its rampant violations of World Trade Organization (WTO) commitments. [2]

Over the course of the past year, negotiations have been ongoing between the United States and the PRC to resolve the disputes through a comprehensive trade deal. The U.S. negotiating team has been led by Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and USTR Robert Lighthizer. On the Chinese side, the lead negotiator has been Liu He (刘鹤), a Vice-Premier of the PRC State Council and a member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo. However, perhaps most importantly in terms of real clout, Liu is a senior aide to CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping, and the director of the executive office of the CCP Central Leading Small Group for Financial and Economic Affairs (*Zhongyang Caijing Lingdao Xiaozu*, 中央财经领导小组) ([China Vitae](#), undated; [SCMP](#), March 21, 2018).

Even as punitive tariffs escalated over the past year, the lead negotiators maintained an optimistic tone that a successful deal would ultimately be struck. In mid-April, Secretary Mnuchin commented that the talks were “close to the final round” ([Reuters](#), April 13). Through the first week of May, official PRC government sources also maintained a generally positive message that the talks had “achieved positive progress,” and consistently reiterated vague talking points that the country was seeking “a mutually-beneficial agreement on the basis of mutual respect” ([China Daily](#), May 3; [PRC Foreign Ministry](#), May 6). A May 8th commentary from the PRC state news agency Xinhua stated that “Negotiation teams have been working overtime to reach a deal that is good for both sides... At such a critical stage, the people of China, the United States and the world don't want to see the outcomes reached in previous talks return to square one” ([Xinhua](#), May 8).

The Breakdown of U.S.-China Trade Talks in Early May

However, there were rumblings of trouble when the PRC delegation arrived in Washington, D.C. on May 9th for another round of talks. Beijing's intent to reassert centralized role in the trade dispute was signaled by the fact that, for this new round of talks, Liu He was stripped of his previous designation as Xi's "special envoy" ([CNBC](#), May 9). This possibly indicated that Liu and his team of negotiators had stepped beyond the comfort zone of the top CCP leadership, and that Liu's room for maneuver in negotiating a deal was to be significantly curtailed.



Image: PRC Vice-Premier Liu He, the lead Chinese negotiator in recent U.S.-China trade talks, speaks with reporters upon his May 9th arrival in Washington. Negotiations formally broke down the next day with the U.S. announcement of another major round of tariffs on Chinese-made goods. (Source: [CCTV](#))

Almost as soon as this new round of talks began, the negotiations abruptly broke down. On May 10th, the Office of the USTR released a statement that the United States had "increased the level of tariffs from 10 percent to 25 percent on approximately \$200 billion worth of Chinese imports," and would further "begin the process of raising tariffs on essentially all remaining imports from China, which are valued at approximately \$300 billion" ([USTR](#), May 10). In retaliation, the PRC Finance Ministry has announced additional tariff hikes of up to 25% on \$60 billion in U.S. goods, to commence in June ([CNBC](#), May 13).

Messages from PRC state media in the aftermath of the May 10th tariffs announcement have been a mix of nationalist defiance—accusing U.S. negotiators of bad faith and unreasonable demands, while asserting that China will not submit to foreign pressure—alongside muted conciliatory calls to return to the negotiating table. Most strikingly, the week beginning May 12th saw a flurry of editorials about the trade dispute in the official CCP mouthpiece *People's Daily*—editorials that employed the pseudonym *Zhong Sheng* (钟声), a signal of increased authoritativeness and importance. [3] A *Zhong Sheng* editorial on May 13th asserted that China would "never yield to the extreme pressure from the U.S., or compromise on matters of principle," but also

that “cooperation is the only right choice for both sides... as a sound bilateral relationship can benefit not only China and the U.S., but also the whole world” ([People’s Daily](#), May 13). A similar *Zhong Sheng* editorial May 17th re-asserted the theme that “China will never make concessions on major issues of principle,” and stressed that “its core concerns must be addressed” ([People’s Daily](#), May 17)—potentially a veiled message for U.S. negotiators to back away from demands seen as threatening to the CCP’s domestic authority (see *further below*).

Reading between the lines, there are indications that the collapse of the talks has rattled CCP leaders. A PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman declared on May 16th that China had the “confidence and capacity to fend off any external risks and shocks” that might result from the trade disputes; and further declared that, despite trade disruptions, China had seen an above-projection GDP growth of 6.4% for the first quarter of 2019 ([Xinhua](#), May 16). However, this is a figure subject to some skepticism, as it accords closely with what internal CCP sources have discussed as the rate of economic growth required to fend off social unrest ([China Brief](#), March 22).

Why Did the Trade Negotiations Collapse?

All of this begs a fundamental question: What brought about the seemingly abrupt collapse of the trade negotiations? There are varying accounts as to what went wrong behind the scenes in late April and early May. However, the primary reason appears to be that, in early May, the PRC team presented their American counterparts with a dramatically edited-down version of a draft agreement-in-progress. This red-inked version gutted both benchmarks for progress and proposed changes to PRC law (such as more explicit protections for foreign firms against forced tech transfer and cyber espionage). U.S. negotiators had demanded these provisions, as well as stipulated enforcement mechanisms and penalties for non-compliance (such as additional tariffs).

By this account, the text of the agreement-in-progress encountered stiff opposition when the draft document was circulated amongst the higher echelons of the CCP in late April—to include fears that, if the provisions were made public, the government would appear to be caving to foreign pressure ([SCMP](#), May 16). Other accounts have also emphasized broad pressure exerted against any agreement by state-owned enterprises (SOEs), whose interests would be directly threatened by U.S. demands to restrict industrial subsidies and export subsidies ([Nikkei Asia](#), May 16). Some sources further speculated that Xi Jinping and other senior CCP figures may have overestimated the eagerness of their American counterparts to cut a deal—and thereby miscalculated that they could slip through a dramatic set of eleventh-hour demands ([New York Times](#), May 16).

Whatever the specific details, it appears likely that senior figures in the CCP hierarchy—almost certainly including Xi Jinping himself—intervened to demand major revisions to the draft agreement, decisively rejecting any provisions that either bound the Chinese government to painful reforms, or which might be

construed as buckling to U.S. pressure. As paramount leader, Xi is faced with appeals from technocratic officials to get trade relations back on track, and the ongoing trade disputes are hurting the economy—thereby potentially weakening Xi's own position, and leading to fears of social unrest ([China Brief](#), August 1, 2018; [China Brief](#), September 19, 2018; [China Brief](#), March 22). However, Xi must also contend with harder-line voices intent on rejecting U.S. demands, and Xi's own instincts as a statist and nationalist have likely inclined him to throw his support behind this latter group. [4]

Conclusions

For the time being, the prospects for a comprehensive deal to end the U.S.-China "trade war" appear to be dim. On the Chinese side, there are likely two primary sticking points. The first is a staunchly nationalist mindset amongst a large proportion of the CCP leadership (and Xi Jinping himself) that any and all "foreign interference" in China's affairs must be rejected, even when those pressures apply to international commitments that the PRC has assumed as a member of the WTO. This connects in turn to leadership fears of a loss of face amongst the Chinese public if the imposition of enforcement mechanisms, changes to PRC law, or similar provisions are revealed.

The second major reason may be the most difficult of all to overcome. Many of the demands presented by U.S. trade negotiators—such as the reduction of industrial subsidies—threaten a core element of PRC industrial policy, as well as the interests of China's huge and well-entrenched SOEs. Senior-level SOE officials are closely integrated into the CCP hierarchy, and SOEs represent a major constituency within the party-state. Furthermore, throughout his tenure Xi Jinping has been engaged in an on-going drive to reinforce the leading role of SOEs as both economic actors and as institutions that buttress the ruling status of the CCP. It is on this account that demands to decouple state-provided benefits to SOEs could be interpreted by Chinese leaders as a threat to the PRC's domestic political order. Finally, potential job losses associated with diminished state support to SOEs could lead to "social instability," the perennial bugbear of the leadership.

The trade war with the United States has placed the current CCP leadership in a quandary: whether to consider concessions that could get exports and economic growth back on track, or to dig in nationalist heels in defense of the PRC's existing economic and political order. Barring a sudden and dramatic policy shift in Beijing, for the foreseeable future the latter course appears far more likely.

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Notes

[1] *Trade Act of 1974 [Public Law 93–618]*, Section 301 (pp. 191-193).

<http://legcounsel.house.gov/Comps/93-618.pdf>.

[2] Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, *2018 Report to Congress on China's WTO Compliance* (February 2019), p. 2.

<https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/2018-USTR-Report-to-Congress-on-China%27s-WTO-Compliance.pdf>.

[3] *Zhong Sheng* (钟声) means literally “the tolling of a bell.” However, it is also a homonym for *Zhong Sheng* (中声), an abbreviated form of “the Voice of China” (*Zhongguo zhi Sheng*, 中国之声). This pseudonym has long been attached to particular editorials in *People’s Daily* when the authorities wish to assert that these editorials carry the official weight of high-level CCP central authority.

[4] Comments by Dr. Willy Lam in an e-mail to the author, May 16, 2019.

The People’s Liberation Army Strategic Support Force: Update 2019

By Adam Ni and Bates Gill

Introduction

China established the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Strategic Support Force (SSF) (*zhanlue zhiyuan budui*, 战略支援部队) in late 2015 as part of a sweeping military reform that overhauled the PLA’s organizational structure, command and control systems, and operational paradigm. At its core, the reform aimed to improve the PLA’s ability to fight informationized conflicts (*xinxihua zhanzheng*, 信息化战争), and enhance joint operations and power projection capabilities in support of China’s strategic aims ([Xinhua](#), January 1, 2016).

In the three and half years since the creation of the SSF, a trickle of Chinese language sources has allowed foreign analysts to piece together a coherent, albeit incomplete, picture of this young but opaque organization ([China Brief](#), February 8, 2016; [China Brief](#), December 26, 2016; [RAND](#), November 10, 2017; [Cyber Defense Review](#), July 31, 2018; [Project 2049 Institute](#), September 25, 2018; [NDU](#), October 2, 2018). This article aims to provide an up-to-date outline of the SSF’s missions, leadership, and organizational structure. Note that the SSF is still in the process of consolidating, reorganizing and integrating the assorted capabilities and organizations that have fallen under its banner. This extensive effort will likely take years to complete.

Official Characterizations of the SSF

Despite the apparent importance of the SSF, official characterizations have been somewhat vague. According to China’s Ministry of National Defense spokesperson Senior Colonel Yang Yujun (杨宇军):

“The Strategic Support Force is a new-type combat force for safeguarding national security. It is an important growth point of the military’s new combat capability. It is mainly formed from the functional integration of various types of support forces with strong strategic, foundational and supportive functions. The establishment of the Strategic Support Force is conducive for optimizing the military’s force structure and improving integrated support capabilities. [The PLA] will persist with system integration, military-civilian integration, the construction of new combat forces, and will strive to build a strong and modern strategic support force.” ([MND](#), January 1, 2016)

The PLA's concept of "new-type combat force" (*xinxing zuozhan liliang*, 新型作战力量) is noteworthy because it concisely encapsulates the *raison d'être* of the SSF. One PLA source describes it as a "product of developments in military technology and the evolution of warfare"—one centered on leveraging space, electromagnetic, and network capabilities as key enablers of integrated joint operations across multiple domains of conflict, including land, sea, air, space and network domains ([PLA Daily](#), June 10, 2015). Indeed, the 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* published by the PLA Academy of Military Science calls for prioritizing the development of "new-type combat forces" with respect to "near space, outer space and network space" that are "able to surpass geographical barriers and directly threaten the center of gravity and key nodes of an enemy's combat systems" ([AMS](#), December, 2013).

Another aspect worth highlighting is the critical role of the SSF in enabling joint operations. The SSF aspires to be the PLA's "information umbrella" (*xinxi san*, 信息伞), integrated throughout the full cycle of land, sea, air and missile force operations, from start to finish ([People.cn](#), January 24, 2016).

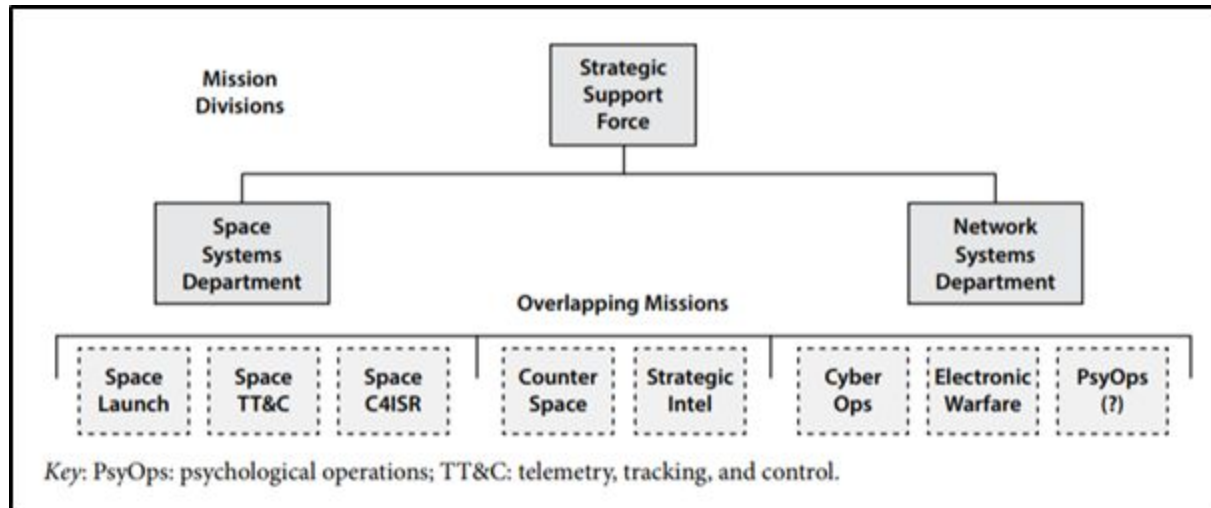


Image: PLA Strategic Support Force personnel present identification at a muster prior to the "Zhuhun-2018" [铸魂-2018] training competition. (Source: [China Military Net](#))

Missions and Drivers

The SSF, as the new information warfare force of the PLA, has two primary missions. First, it is to provide the PLA with strategic information support through space and network-based capabilities, including communications, navigation and positioning, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and the protection of military information infrastructure. Second, the SSF is to conduct information operations, including space and counterspace, cyber, electromagnetic warfare, and psychological operations.

Another way of understanding SSF missions is to consider the division of labor between the organization's space and network forces (*see graph below*). It is important to note that there are overlapping missions, including counter-space and strategic intelligence.



(Source: [NDU](#), October 2, 2018)

The main driver for the creation of the SSF is the desire to consolidate most of the PLA's information warfare capabilities within one organization in order to facilitate integrated information support and operations, enhance coordination, and achieve efficiency gains. Seen from a bureaucratic angle, the SSF is the inheritor of much of the PLA's information capabilities that were housed in the former four general headquarters, and especially in the General Staff Department (GSD) and General Armaments Department (GAD), all of which were dissolved in the reorganization announced in December 2015.

The creation of the SSF clearly signals the importance of information dominance for China's military planners. It is also a direct recognition that the "strategic frontiers" (*zhanlue bianjiang*, 战略边疆) of space and cyberspace are vital to China's expanding hard power as well as its broader strategic interests, including economic growth and technological development. [1]

Leadership of the Strategic Support Force

In the PLA hierarchy, the grade of a person or organization determines their relative seniority. Generally, each grade level has two ranks assigned to it. For example, a Theater Command Leader grade position can be assigned to either a General (*shang jiang*, 上将) or a Lieutenant General (*zhong jiang*, 中将). [2] As the table below shows, the senior leadership of the SSF consists of two Theater Command Leader (*zheng zhanqu zhi*, 正战区职) grade officers, and at least seven Theater Command Deputy Leader (*fu zhanqu zhi*, 副战区职) grade officers [3]. The SSF Commander and Political Commissar are both supported by three deputies, respectively.

Strategic Support Force Leadership (current as of May 23, 2019)

	Grade	Rank	Name	Role
1	Theater Command Leader	Lieutenant General	Li Fengbiao 李凤彪	Commander
2	Theater Command Leader	General	Zheng Weiping 郑卫平	Political Commissar
3	Theater Command Deputy Leader	Lieutenant General	Rao Kaixun 饶开勋	Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff
4	Theater Command Deputy Leader	Lieutenant General	Lu Jiancheng 吕建成	Deputy Political Commissar, and Secretary, Discipline Inspection Commission
5	Theater Command Deputy Leader	Lieutenant General	Feng Jianhua 冯建华	Director, Political Work Department
6	Theater Command Deputy Leader	Lieutenant General	Shang Hong 尚宏	Deputy Commander; and Director, Space Systems Department
7	Theater Command Deputy Leader	Lieutenant General	Kang Chunyuan 康春元	Deputy Political Commissar, and Political Commissar, Space Systems Department
8	Theater Command Deputy Leader	Lieutenant General	Zheng Junjie 郑俊杰	Deputy Commander; and Director, Network Systems Department
9	Theater Command Deputy Leader	Lieutenant General	Chai Shaoliang 柴绍良	Deputy Political Commissar, and Political Commissar, Network Systems Department
Sources: (1) CCTV , May 8; (2) The Paper , Nov 11, 2017; (3) The Paper , Nov 10, 2017; (4) The Paper , June 7, 2016; (5) Caixin , February 29, 2016; (6) The Paper , October 30, 2017; (7) Caixin , August 29, 2016; (8) The Paper , March 7, 2018; (9) Sohu , May 28, 2017.				

Lieutenant General Li Fengbiao (李凤彪, b. 1959) succeeded the first SSF Commander, General Gao Jin (高津), in March 2019 ([CCTV](#), May 8; [Mingpao](#), May, 6). His past roles include: Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff, Central Theater Command (2016-2019); Deputy Commander, Chengdu Military Region (2014-2016); and Commander, 15th Airborne Corps (2011-2014) ([The Paper](#), February 4, 2016; [Sohu](#), January 1, 2015; [Global Times](#), July 7, 2015). He has spent most of his 40-year military career in the PLA Air Force Airborne Corps.

General Zheng Weiping (郑卫平, b. 1955) has been the SSF Political Commissar since mid-2017 ([Caixin](#), October 22, 2017; [Phoenix Net](#), November 3, 2017). He replaced the first SSF Political Commissar, General Liu Fulian (刘福连). General Zheng's past roles include: Political Commissar, Eastern Theater Command (2016-2017); Political Commissar, Nanjing Military Region (2012-2016); and Director, Political Department, Guangzhou Military Region (2007-2012) ([Baidu Baike](#), July 11, 2018).

Lieutenant General Rao Kaixun (饶开勋, b. 1964) has served as an SSF Deputy Commander since January 2016 ([The Paper](#), March 11, 2016). Although unconfirmed, we assess that he is also its current Chief of Staff. His past roles include: Director, General Staff Department Operations Department (2013-2015); Commander, 14th (now 75th) Group Army; and Chief of Staff, 13th (now 77th) Group Army (2010-2012) ([Baidu Baike](#), May 10, 2018; [Project 2049 Institute](#), September 25, 2018).

Lieutenant General Lu Jiancheng (吕建成, b. 1956) has served as a SSF Deputy Political Commissar and Secretary of its Discipline Inspection Commission since 2016 ([The Paper](#), September 27, 2016). His past roles include: Deputy Political Commissar, Jinan Military Region (2009-2016); Political Commissar, People's Armed Police Chongqing Command; and Political Commissar, People's Armed Police Gold Force Command ([The Paper](#), June 7, 2016; [Baidu Baike](#), August 15, 2018).

Lieutenant General Feng Jianhua (冯建华, b. 1958) has served as the Director of SSF's Political Work Department since January 2016. His past roles include: Deputy Director, GAD Political Department; and Director, GPD Cadre Department ([The Paper](#), February 28, 2016).

Lieutenant General Shang Hong (尚宏, b. 1960) has served as a SSF Deputy Commander and Director of its Space Systems Department since 2016. His past roles include: Deputy Director, GAD (2015); Chief of Staff, GAD (2011-2015); and Director, Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center (2013-2016) ([Caixin](#), October 19, 2017; [Baidu Baike](#), May 10, 2018; [Project 2049 Institute](#), September 25, 2018).

Lieutenant General Kang Chunyuan (康春元, b. 1958) has served as a SSF Deputy Political Commissar, and the Political Commissar of the SSF Space Systems Department since 2016 ([Caixin](#), August 29, 2016). His past roles include: Deputy Political Commissar, Lanzhou Military Region (2014-2015); and Deputy Director, Political Department, Beijing Military Region (2010-2014) ([Baidu Baike](#), July 2, 2018).

Lieutenant General Zheng Junjie (郑俊杰, b. 1957) has served as a SSF Deputy Commander and Director of its Network Systems Department since 2016. His past roles include: President, PLA Information Engineering University (2013-2015); Deputy Director, GSD Technical Reconnaissance Department (2015) ([Tencent](#), March 10, 2018; [The Paper](#), May 6, 2015).

Lieutenant General Chai Shaoliang (柴绍良, b. 1954) probably has served as a Deputy Political Commissar, and and the Political Commissar of the SSF Space Systems Department since 2016 ([NPC](#), February, 2018). His past roles include: Deputy Political Commissar, GAD (2014-2015); Deputy Political Commissar, Chengdu Military Region (until 2014); Director, Political Department, Chengdu Military Region (from 2011); and Director, GPD Organization Department (2009-2011) ([Baidu Baike](#), March 13).

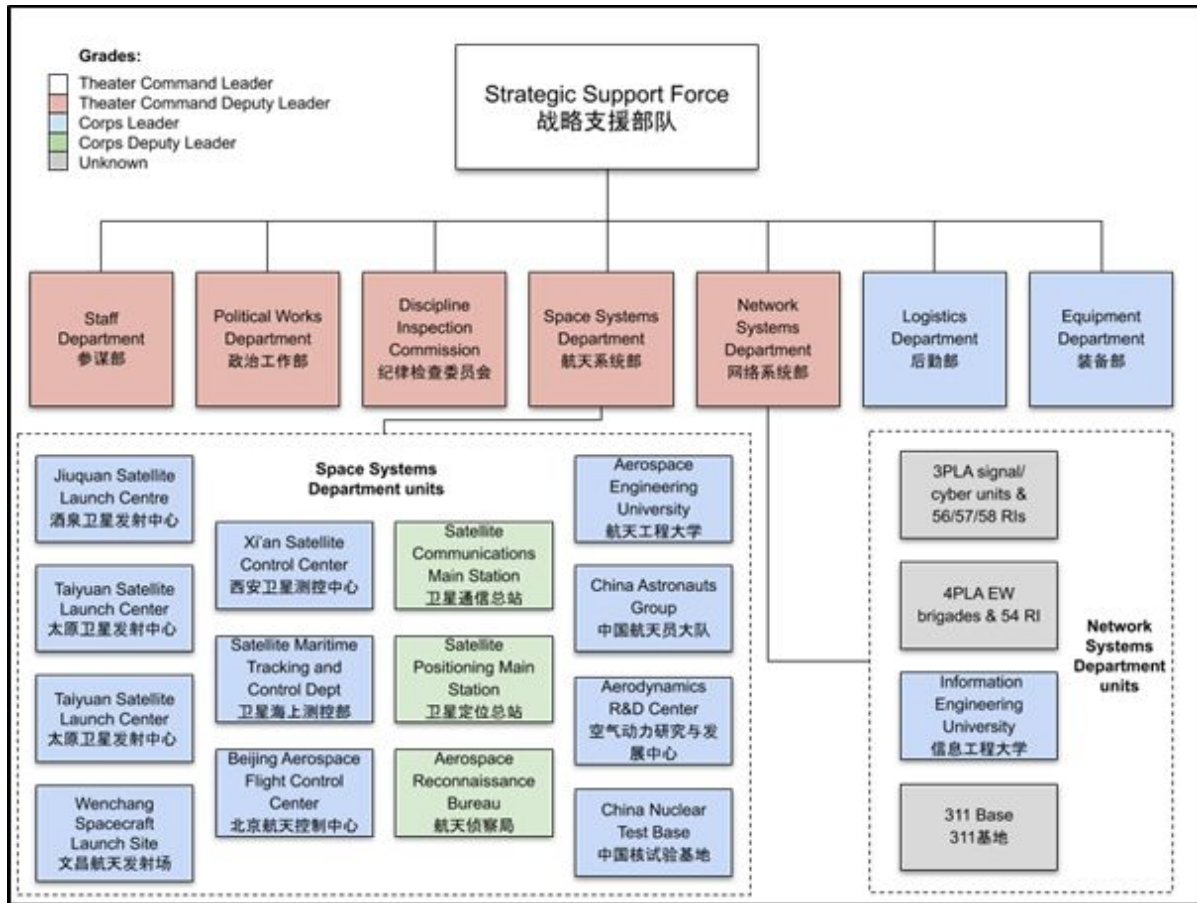


Images: Senior officers of the SSF in previous roles. Top: Then-Deputy Commander of the Sichuan Military Region Li Fengbiao (center) inspects the construction site of a military hospital in 2015. (Source: [CECEP.cn](#))

Bottom: Then-Political Commissar for the Nanjing Military Region Zheng Weiping is congratulated by CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping at a 2015 ceremony marking Zheng's promotion to full General. (Source: [CCTV](#))



Organizational Structure and Composition



At the top of SSF's organizational structure stand six 1st-level departments (four administrative and two operational) and the Discipline Inspection Commission. The anomaly in the SSF structure is that the two operational departments - the Space Systems Department (SSD) and the Network Systems Department (NSD) - are at the same grade (Theater Command Deputy Leader) as the Staff Department. This means that they are likely to report directly to the SSF headquarters instead of the Staff Department.

Administrative Organs

The Staff Department (*Canmou Bu*, 参谋部) is responsible for operations and planning, training, project management and oversight, and personnel management. Four subordinate bureaus have been identified: the Operational Planning Bureau (*Zhanqin Jihua Ju*, 战勤计划局), the Training Bureau (*Xunlian Ju*, 训练局), the Direct Subordinate Works Bureau (*Zhishu Gongzuo Ju*, 直属工作局), and the Navigation Bureau (*Daohang Ju*, 导航局) ([National Health Commission](#), September 7, 2018; [Xi'an Jiaotong University](#), May 29, 2018; [Eastern Headlines](#), September 22, 2016).

The other top-tier administrative organs include the Political Works Department (*Zhengzhi Gongzuo Bu*, 政治工作部), the Discipline and Inspection Commission (*Jilu Jiancha Weiyuanhui*, 纪律检查委员会), the Logistics Department (*Houqin Bu*, 后勤部), and the Equipment Department (*Zhuangbei Bu*, 装备部) ([Sina](#), June 26, 2018; [Chaoyang Daily](#), July 27, 2018; [Sina](#), March 10; [Project 2049 Institute](#), September 25, 2018; [jsccexpo](#), 2018/2019).

Space Systems Department (SSD)

The SSD is responsible for executing the SSF's space mission. The SSD has consolidated nearly every aspect of China's military space operations, including space launch, telemetry, tracking, and control (TT&C), satellite communications, space intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), and space-related R&D and support. They also appear to have administrative responsibilities for China's astronauts. Before the reform of 2015/2016, these space-related responsibilities were held under the GAD, and to a lesser extent, the GSD.

The tables below outlines SSF SSD's subordinate organizations according to their functions.

Space Launch Facilities

	Name	Cover Designation	MUCD	Grade
1	Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre 酒泉卫星发射中心	20th Testing and Training Base 第20试验训练基地	63600	Corps Leader
2	Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center 太原卫星发射中心	25th Testing and Training Base 第25试验训练基地	63710	Corps Leader
3	Xichang Satellite Launch Center 西昌卫星发射中心	27th Testing and Training Base 第25试验训练基地	63790	Corps Leader
4	Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site 文昌航天发射场			Corps Leader
Sources: (1) The Paper , January 19, 2018; (2); Zhejiang University , September 30, 2016 (3) Yibin News Network , June 12, 2014; Government of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture , April 24, 2015; (4) PLA Daily , May 8, 2016; The Paper , November 3, 2016.				

Telemetry, Tracking, and Control

	Name	Cover Designation	MUCD	Grade
1	Xi'an Satellite Control Center* 西安卫星测控中心	26th Testing and Training Base 第26试验训练基地	63750	Corps Leader
2	China Satellite Maritime Tracking and Control Department** 中国卫星海上测控部	23th Testing and Training Base 第23试验训练基地	63680	Corps Leader
3	Beijing Aerospace Flight Control Center 北京航天控制中心			Corps Leader

Sources: (1) [People's Government of Weinan City](#), October 21, 2014, [Xi'an Satellite Control Center](#), March 10, 2018; (2) [Jianyang Network](#), July 29, 2014; (3) [SSF](#), April 10, 2016; [Xinhua](#), April 11, 2016; [China Military Online](#), June 23, 2016.

* Xi'an Satellite Control Center administers China's land-based TT&C network for space operations, including stations in Changchun (Jilin Province), Jiamusi (Heilongjiang Province), Kashi (Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region), Minxi (Fujian Province), Nanning (Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), Qingdao (Shandong Province), Sanya (Hainan Province), and Weinan (Shaanxi Province)

**The China Satellite Maritime Tracking and Control Department manages a fleet of four space tracking ships (Yuanwang 3, 5, 6 and 7) and two specialized cargo ships (Yuanwang 21 and 22) designed to transport heavy-lift orbital launch vehicles, such as the Long March 5 or 7 series.

Space-Based Communications and ISR

	Name	MUCD	Grade
1	Satellite Communications Main Station** 卫星通信总站	61096	Corps Deputy Leader
2	Satellite Positioning Main Station 卫星定位总站 (Base 35)		Corps Deputy Leader
3	Aerospace Reconnaissance Bureau* 航天侦察局	61646	Corps Deputy Leader

Sources: (1) [Strategic Frontier Technology](#), August 24, 2017; [Baidu Answers](#), March 17, 2016; (2) [Microstate](#), January 3, 2019; (3) [PLA Daily](#), April 9, 2016.

* The Aerospace Reconnaissance Bureau is responsible for space-based ISR. It was transferred to the SSF SSD from the former GSD Intelligence Department (2PLA), which has now become the Central Military Commission (*Zhongyang Junshi Weiyuanhui*, 中央军事委员会, CMC) Joint Staff Department (*Lianhe Canmou Bu*, 联合参谋部, JSD) Intelligence Bureau (*Qingbao Ju*, 情报局, JSD-IB).

** The Satellite Communications Main Station is responsible for managing the PLA's military satellite communication network. It was transferred to the SSF SSD from the GSD Informatization Department (*Zong Can Xinxihua Bu*, 总参信息化部), which has now become the CMC JSD Information Communication Bureau (*Xinxi Tongxin Ju*, 信息通信局, JSD-CIB).

R&D and Support

	Name	Roles
1	Aerospace Engineering University 航天工程大学	PLA's primary education and training institution for space command, management and engineering.
2	China Astronauts Group* 中国航天员大队	Manages China's astronaut corps, who are now all believed to be SSF officers.
3	Beijing Institute of Tracking and Communication Technology 北京跟踪与通信技术研究所	R&D on space information and communication, and, navigation and control.
4	Aerodynamics Research and Development Center** 空气动力研究与发展中心	29th Testing and Training Base 第29试验训练基地 (Unit 63820) China's biggest institute for aerodynamics R&D.
5	Aerospace Research Development Center 航天研发中心	
6	Engineering Design Institute 工程设计研究所	
7	China Nuclear Test Base 中国核试验基地	29th Testing and Training Base 第29试验训练基地 (Unit 63650) R&D on nuclear science and technology, radiation, laser technology, and direct energy applications.

Sources: (1) [MND](#), June 29, 2017; (2) [World Daily](#), October 19, 2017; [Sina](#), April 13, 2018; (3); [Xinhua](#), September 15, 2016; (4) [QQ](#), May 19, 2018; (5) and (6) [Zhejiang University](#), September 30, 2016; (7) [China Military TV Web](#), August 12, 2016; [Wuhan University](#), December 2, 2015.

*Note that the overall responsibility for the military aspects of China's human spaceflight program rests with the CMC Equipment Development Department (*Junwei Zhuangbei Fazhan Bu*, 军委装备发展部).

**The Aerodynamics Research and Development Center was transferred to the SSF SSD from the former GAD in late-2015/early-2016. It may have been transferred to the Academy of Military Science (AMS), possibly in early-2018, as part of PLA's consolidation of science and technology R&D under the AMS.

Network Systems Department (网络系统部, NSD)

The NSD is responsible for executing the SSF's network (*wangluo*, 网络) mission, which includes, and potentially integrates, a diverse range of operations, including signals intelligence, cyber espionage, computer attack, electromagnetic warfare and psychological operations.

The NSD is built around the former GSD Technical Reconnaissance Department (*Zong Canmou Jishu Zhencha Bu*, 总参谋部技术侦察部; 3PLA), which was responsible for signal intelligence and cyber espionage ([Military Procurement Information Network](#), December 6, 2016). The NSD has absorbed most of the 12 bureaus previously under the 3PLA, including the 2nd (Unit 61398), 4th (Unit 61419), 8th (Unit 61786) and 12th Bureaus (61486) ([NDU](#), October 2, 2018; [Ming Pao](#), August 25, 2016; [Military Channel](#), September 28, 2016; [Sohu](#), August 26, 2016). In addition, the NSD has taken control of GSD 56th, 57th, 58th Research Institutes which provided research support to 3PLA missions ([Ministry of Education](#), May 12, 2018; [Sichuan Education News](#), April 1, 2017, [Student Examination Network](#), December 30, 2016)

Prior to the 2015/2016 reform, strategic electronic warfare (EW) and computer network attack was the responsibility of the GSD Electronic Countermeasures and Radar Department (*Dianzi Duikang yu Leida Bu*, 电子对抗与雷达部; 4PLA), and computer network defense was handled by the GSD Informatization Department. Some of these capabilities have been transferred to the NSD, including selected EW brigades that were previously under the 4PLA ([China Net](#), December 19, 2014; [China Military Online](#), May 16, 2017). In addition, the 54th Research Institute and the Information Engineering University (*Xinxi Gongcheng Daxue*, 信息工程大学) have also been transferred to the NSD, which underscores its key role in signal intelligence, cyber and EW missions ([Beijing Guotai Jianzhong Management and Consulting](#); October 31, 2016; [PLA Daily](#), June 13, 2016).

Given the PLA's aspirations to integrate network reconnaissance, attack and defense, it is likely that both offensive and defensive cyber capabilities have fallen primarily under the SSF's remit ([AMS](#), December, 2013).

Other units identified under the SSF include the SSF Network Security Base (*Wangluo Anquan Jidi*, 网络安全基地); the Luoyang Electronic Equipment Testing Center (*Luoyang Dianzi Zhuangbei Shiyan Zhongxin*, 洛阳电子装备试验中心; Unit 63880), a key military and national base for testing electronic information systems under electromagnetic environments; and the 311 Base (*311 Jidi*, 311基地), the “Three Warfare” base that specializes in psychological operations ([Xinhua](#), May 16, 2018; [China Southern Power Grid](#), September 27, 2018; [Tsinghua University](#), December 20, 2016; [The Paper](#), December 21, 2016).

Conclusions

The creation of the SSF highlights the very high priority the PLA has placed on being able to fight and win future conflicts fought in the cyberspace and outer space domains. It is also an important step in the PLA’s journey towards realizing integrated information operations and deploying an integrated strategic deterrent. Since its establishment in late-2015, the SSF has consolidated most of China’s military space and information warfare capabilities. But clearly, it is still a force in transition, and we should expect further changes to its organizational structure and composition, and operational thinking.

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Notes

[1] PLA strategists have repeatedly underscored the importance of “strategic frontiers” for military operations, and strategic competition more broadly. For a concise overview of the concept, see Zhou Bisong, “Strategic Frontiers,” *Military Reporter*, August 15, 2016, http://zlzy.81.cn/tb/2016-08/15/content_7231775.htm.

[2] For a detailed explanation of the PLA’s grade and rank systems, see Kevin Pollpeter and Kenneth W. Allen, eds., *The PLA as Organization v2.0* (Vienna, VA: Defense Group Inc., 2015), pp. 6-21, <https://bit.ly/2HQLZR6>. Some of the grade names have changed since its publication due to the 2015/2016 reform, specifically the replacement of Military Regions with the Theater Command system. For an up-to-date table showing PLA’s grade and rank structures, see US Department of Defense, *Directory of PRC Military Personalities* (2018), p. xxxvii. This table is publically available in Rachael Burton and Mark Stokes, *The People’s Liberation Army Strategic Support Force Leadership and Structure*, Project 2049 Institute, September 25, 2018, p.5, <https://bit.ly/2VY0zjU>.

[3] For more detail on the grades of SSF's leaders, organs and subordinate organizations, see Rachael Burton and Mark Stokes, *The People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force Leadership and Structure*, Project 2049 Institute, September 25, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2VY0zjU>.

The “16+1” Becomes the “17+1”: Greece Joins China’s Dwindling Cooperation Framework in Central and Eastern Europe

By Horia Cuiartin

Introduction: China’s (Junior) European Partners in the “16+1”

On the heels of People’s Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping’s busy bilateral tour in Western Europe in March, PRC Premier Li Keqiang started his own multilateral tour in Eastern Europe in April. Designed primarily to visit Beijing’s established partners in European Union (EU) central institutions ([EU-China Joint Statement](#), April 9), Li’s visit nonetheless touched upon a side project of no marginal importance for the larger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): the “16+1” framework of cooperation with countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). [1] Thus, on April 11 and 12, participants met in the Croatian town of Dubrovnik for the framework’s 8th Summit, as well as for its 9th Business Forum ([Agenda of 8th Summit of Central and Eastern European Countries & China - 9th Business Forum of CEEC & China](#), April 11-12).

Perhaps not coincidentally, the same venue witnessed the advent of the “Three Seas Initiative” in 2016, a sub-regional project meant to increase integration of EU countries in the area—an event in which the PRC took part as an observer (with Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Haixing in attendance). [2] The symbolic value of this place—which was chosen instead of the more convenient Croatian capital—offers a glimpse into Beijing’s intentions in the area: a strand of economic and diplomatic engagement that runs parallel to European integration, without explicitly doubling or challenging it. Thus, the PRC seeks influence in Europe when encountering little or no resistance—seeking to fill an opening when available, but without confronting established players head-on. [3]

Business (Not) as Usual: A Changing Landscape in CEE

In regard to the 16+1 format, circumstances have changed since the last annual summit in Sofia. The players’ relative positions, and the playing field itself, have both changed. While some major European capitals have shifted their approaches towards China in a more accommodating direction ([AGI](#), March 23; [Memorandum d’intesa](#) March 23; [China Brief](#), April 24), central EU institutions have voiced increasing reservations about cooperation with the PRC. In this sense, by designating China as a “systemic rival” ([European Commission & HR/VP](#), March 12), they have displayed intentions to deal with Beijing in a coherent

and unitary manner—thereby explicitly leaving a reduced space for developing the 16+1 format as an eccentric offshoot of broader EU-China cooperation efforts.

Confronted with these developments for some time now, some CEE states that are members of the European Union (and close partners of the United States) have started to pursue a path of inertial participation—or outright disengagement—from the 16+1 format. Poland, the Czech Republic ([China Brief](#), February 15), Romania, and the Baltic states are at the forefront of this strategic shift, leaving Hungary and the more China-dependent Balkan states to keep the 16+1 format afloat. This development can be explained by a variety of both economic and strategic-political factors.

In the first sense, many CEE countries that are strongly reliant on the United States for their security have taken notice of the U.S. Secretary of State's hinted warnings regarding close cooperation with China. In his own recent Central European tour, Mr. Pompeo made clear reference to Beijing's growing influence in the area—especially in the sensitive telecom sector ([Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#), February 11; [U.S. Department of State](#), February 10). Against the background of increasing competition between global players such as the PRC, the United States, and the European Union, Mr. Pompeo seemed to provide implicit warnings about carefully choosing long-term friends.

Economic considerations also play an important role in this equation. The dearth of Chinese greenfield and infrastructural foreign direct investment in Europe—doubled by a worsening trade balance in almost all CEE countries—prompted some CEE countries to abandon (or at least put on hold) many joint projects with China, pending the opportunity to extract more benefits from available EU funding sources. Attracting such EU financing might present itself as a lower-risk opportunity both commercially and strategically. For these reasons, right until the Dubrovnik summit, the 16+1 format maintained the appearance of a watered-down mode of cooperation, reluctantly surviving from one year to the next—and merely parading some landmark projects, such as the Serbian-Hungarian railway. [4] The 16+1 format appeared to be stuck in institutional and economic limbo, until China decided to give it a strategic push in early 2019.

A Capricious Enlargement Mechanism: Who Runs the 17+1 Show?

Enter Greece, the financially troubled member of the EU's southern flank. For the first time since the early beginning of the 16+1 format in 2011-2012, a new member was considered for acceptance. The 2019 Dubrovnik summit saw the first “enlargement” of the cooperation pattern, explicitly transforming it into a “17+1” platform ([CGTN](#), April 13; [SCMP](#), April 12). However, this sub-regional economic community places a great emphasis on the leading role of China within the initiative—showing that the “+1” part is the one that really matters in considering the initiative's future course.

Greece's entry was a one-on-one negotiation that primarily involved Athens and Beijing, at the initiative of Greek Premier Alexis Tsipras. Only later were the opinions of the 16 other participants taken into

consideration. The joint understanding of the Greek and Chinese governments was subsequently presented to the 16 European members for the purpose of notification and consultation—but in reality, Beijing's acceptance was the decisive factor in allowing the Hellenic Republic to join the format. [5] Unlike other prospective members—such as Austria between the Belgrade and Suzhou summits, or the Republic of Moldova in an earlier period—Greece has been welcomed as a full member of the initiative. This was done without offering any explanation, or an intelligible blueprint for further admissions into the club, which has raised an additional layer of opacity upon the quasi-institutional mechanisms of the initiative. As was intended from the beginning, China is actually running the 16+1 (now 17+1) show.



Image: Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras speaking at the CEEC-China ("16+1") Summit in Dubrovnik, Croatia, April 12, 2019. (Source: Greek PM Press Office)

(Regional) Deus Ex Machina: Greece as a Putative Game-Changer

Beyond the procedural issues regarding Greece's admission to the platform, other questions remain unanswered. First, the rationales of both Greece and the PRC should be considered. Some analysts have argued that an insistence on showing that Athens is doing well abroad might be the root for Premier Tsipras' step towards the initiative. The accomplishment of joining the format—already signaled as a prospect at the 2018 Sofia summit—might well aid him in domestic political struggles, and offer the glimpse of a renewed Greek presence on the international scene in the aftermath of the Prespa agreement. [6]

While this interpretation of the event has some merits, Greece also has a set of regional reasons for adhering to the cooperation platform. More precisely, it has long been feeling left behind by developments in the Balkan region, a traditional sphere of influence for Athens. Not only the 16+1, but also the Three Seas

Initiative and the renewed impetus for pushing EU enlargement, have proceeded without paying much attention to Hellenic sensibilities or influence—thereby allowing other players to build their positions in the region. This was especially relevant in the context of seeing the BRI building up a foothold in the Balkans, and devising new corridors of communication and transport toward the European core. Finally, for Greece a closer relationship with Beijing offers the possibility of broader benefits, potentially linking up the China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO)'s investments in the port of Piraeus with a network of other infrastructure projects in the region ([National Herald](#), February 4).

For its part, China's motives for integrating Greece into its CEE "roadshow" have symbolic and political underpinnings. The dwindling functionality of 16+1 and the increasing reluctance of some key members (such as Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic) to fully commit to the initiative required the introduction of a new element to dispel the diplomatic inertia. This made Greece the perfect candidate for membership: although it had waited on the sidelines since the Sofia summit of 2018, it was welcomed aboard at Dubrovnik, allowing China to capitalize on the alleged attractiveness of the platform and its rediscovered dynamism.

Furthermore, Greece, as a compliant partner, was a natural choice for Beijing. Greece had previously aligned with PRC interests in other contexts: for example, blocking an EU statement on human rights in China at the United Nations ([Kathimerini](#), June 18, 2017). Greece has also allowed Beijing to tell the world how its diplomatic efforts to reconcile Greece with its North Macedonian neighbor paid off in regional terms, thereby boosting the PRC's regional standing ([CGTN](#), April 14).

Conclusions: The Show Must Go On

Bringing new life into the static 16+1 project was a politically desirable outcome for the China. PRC prestige was at stake, as the management of the relationship with 16 minor European states served as a litmus test for its plans with the wider European Union. Thus, the 16+1 format could not be left to fall into obsolescence, or to maintain a merely inertial existence. On the background of its economic confrontation with the United States and a growing reticence about the BRI throughout Eurasia, China needed a success story in Europe.

That is why the PRC intends to boost the new 17+1 Format with new operational capabilities, more dynamic meetings, and the build-up of a Beijing-driven "coalition of the willing" within the functional limits of the platform. Beijing plans to present Greece as an example as to how China's multilateral initiative is both attractive, and breaks the confined cultural-historical limits of the CEE cooperation format. Unlike other members, Greece is neither a post-Communist state, nor a new or prospective member of the European Union—but rather, a consolidated capitalist democracy whose economic relations with China gained steam in the last decade.

In addition, the Dubrovnik Guidelines ([The Dubrovnik Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries](#), April 12) put a strong emphasis on the platform's success so far, while

signaling a more hands-on approach from China—which has proposed that the next summit take place within its home territory. When considering the static atmosphere of recent years' meetings, and the geopolitical necessity to display at least symbolic progress, it appears that China is (re)taking over the reins of the project, and guiding it towards objectives intended to prop up the BRI in Central and Eastern Europe.. This latter point is mentioned in the Guidelines, as well as in Premier Li Keqiang's speech from Dubrovnik ([Xinhua](#), April 12)—thereby offering a glimpse in Beijing's larger design for the revived 17+1 Format.

Another notable point of the 2019 Dubrovnik summit is that the initiative is now open for new entrants. Austria, Belarus, and the Republic of Moldova—to name just a few countries who have already expressed an interest—have not been explicitly mentioned, but have been designated under the general terms of “some other countries [that] also seek to join the group” ([PRC State Council](#), April 14). Thus, irrespective of the fact that Greece's joining the platform might eventually turn out to be primarily a strategic public relations move and a distraction from the inertial nature of the format, Beijing clearly sends the message that the show goes on—and so it does.

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Notes

[1] The sixteen member nations of the “16+1 Initiative” are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

[2] In this sense, see the Policy Paper prepared by Kamil Calus, Horia Ciurtin, Gheorghe Magheru (authors) & Izet Selim (editor), “The Emergence of a European Project. Three Summits for the Three Seas Initiatives”, New Strategy Center & OSW (Centre for Eastern Studies), June 2018, https://www.newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/NSC_OSW_3SI_policy_paper.pdf

[3] Bruno Mações, *Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order* (Hurst 2018), p. 6.

[4] For more details and a comprehensive analysis of this project see Matt Ferchen, “Hungary-Serbia Railway Case Study and International Comparisons”, contained in the report “Assessing China's Influence in Europe through Investments in Technology and Infrastructure. Four Cases”, Leiden Asia Centre, December 2018, <http://leidenasiacentre.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Influence-in-Europe-through-Investments-and-Technology-anf-infra.pdf>.

[5] Author's interviews with CEE-based experts on international affairs, Bucharest, April 22.

[6] See the report of the Athens-based specialist in China affairs Plamen Tonchev, “17+1: Exo Pame Kala”, *European Interest*, April 13, <https://www.europeaninterest.eu/article/171-exo-pame-kala/>.

Japan Considers a New Security Relationship Via “Networking” with Taiwan

By Howard Wang

Introduction—Japan Seeks “Networking” with Regional Allies

In early May 2019, Japanese Foreign Minister (FM) Taro Kono tweeted support for Taiwan’s bid to attend the World Health Assembly as an observer—thereby advocating for Taiwan’s return to a status it previously held from 2009 until 2016, when the World Health Organization ceased inviting Taiwan at the request of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) ([Twitter](#), May 7; [Focus Taiwan](#), May 8). While Taiwan has long enjoyed U.S. advocacy for limited participation in some international organizations, Kono’s tweet represented the first time that Japan has explicitly voiced similar endorsements in the face of PRC objections ([Japan Times](#), May 8).

This development is only the latest in a recent trend of increasing Japanese support for Taiwan’s international presence: Japan has also formally endorsed Taiwan’s bid to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) trade agreement, and has reportedly been considering establishing a formal security dialogue with Taiwan’s government ([Taipei Times](#), February 19; [Taiwan News](#), March 5). However, improving relations with Taiwan also carries the necessary corollary of worsening relations with the PRC. While Japan and the PRC approached a tentative rapprochement in 2018 around the fortieth anniversary of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, and while Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo continues to describe Sino-Japanese relations as “fully returned to their normal path,” underlying tensions driven by territorial disputes and a growing military imbalance remain unresolved ([China Brief](#), May 31, 2018; [Abe Shinzo](#), January 28).

Such is the context in which Japan-Taiwan relations should be understood: Japan faces an increasingly aggressive PRC, and is therefore seeking increasing cohesion between U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific as a key pillar of its foreign policy. This is a process that Japan’s foreign minister has called “networking” ([Taro Kono](#), January 28). Japanese networking is typically defined as a policy of enhancing Japan’s security cooperation alongside other nations within the American hub-and-spoke network of bilateral military alliances in the Pacific ([Asan Forum](#), February 2016). [1]

Japan’s latest *Diplomatic Bluebook* describes the policy as reinforcing the U.S.-Japan “alliance network by strengthening multilayered cooperative relationships with allies and partners, with the Japan-U.S. Alliance as the cornerstone,” and further notes that Japan has for several years also pursued such a relationship with Australia and India ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(Japan\)](#), October 1, 2018). This has been further underpinned

by a reaffirmed U.S. partnership with Taiwan and unabated military tensions with the PRC. Japan appears to be explicitly improving bilateral ties with Taiwan in non-security capacities, while debating the potential role of the island state as a potential partner for “networking” in regional security.

Japanese Considers Security Networking with Taiwan

Japan’s networking in pursuit of a favorable security environment does not necessarily mean a narrow focus on security dialogues or joint military exercises. Cultural, ideological, and political values matter in securing partners against an authoritarian PRC, and deepening ties with allies can reflect and reinforce these shared values even without explicit security cooperation. FM Taro Kono’s speech at the opening of the 198th Session of the Diet presented an expansive scope for networking: one in which Japan will seek to improve ties not only with “countries sharing strategic interests,” but also with “countries that share common values” including “democracy, basic human rights, the rule of law and respect for international laws” ([Taro Kono](#), January 28).

Due to the complex nature of Japan-PRC relations, Japanese networking with Taiwan has not yet reached the level of overt security cooperation. Much as the U.S. has reaffirmed its commitment to Taiwan without exceeding the terms of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), [2] the government of Prime Minister Abe has maintained an official policy of keeping Japan-Taiwan relations at the non-governmental level, pursuant to the 1972 Japan-China Joint Communiqué ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) (Japan), October 1, 2018).

For its part, the administration of Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) has openly advocated for establishing quasi-official ties beyond the 1972 restrictions. President Tsai explicitly called for official dialogue on Japan-Taiwan security cooperation in an early March interview with *The Sankei Shimbun* ([Sankei Shimbun](#), March 3). More specifically, Taiwan’s *de facto* ambassador to Japan Frank Hsieh (Xie Changting, 謝長廷) and Tsai herself have publicly sought Japanese support for Taiwan’s joining the CPTPP, and for formalizing relations between the two nations. Hsieh has also called on Japan to adopt the long-discussed “Basic Law on Japan-Taiwan Relations” (*Ri-Tai Jiaoliu Jibenfa*, 日台交流基本法), commonly considered a Japanese version of the American TRA ([Epoch Times](#), January 29).

Tsai’s and Hsieh’s economic appeals have been generally well-received: Japan officially welcomed Taiwan’s bid to join the CPTPP, and is entertaining unofficial proposals to offer Taiwan broader diplomatic support in exchange for Taiwan’s commitment to end its ban on importing food from Japan’s Fukushima region ([Taiwan News](#), May 3; [Taiwan News](#), May 8). However, Japan did not affirm Tsai’s call for an official security dialogue, and quietly declined through unnamed sources in PRC and Taiwanese newspapers without issuing a formal statement ([Focus Taiwan](#), March 5).

Despite this avoidance of any formal commitments, Japan may in fact have already begun discreet networking operations: for example, Taiwan’s indigenous submarine industry, the development of which has

been a longstanding priority of Tsai Ing-wen and her political party, has reportedly received unofficial support from Japanese experts. Further, current models for Taiwan's indigenous defense submarines conspicuously resemble Japan's *Soryu*-class submarines, suggesting more significant Japanese involvement than has been officially revealed ([SCMP](#), July 14, 2018; [New Frontier Foundation](#), March 2014; [Taiwan News](#), August 21, 2018; [Shephard News](#), May 10, 2019; [Kyodo News](#), May 9, 2019). The salient question is not whether Japanese interest in formal Japan-Taiwan security cooperation exists; rather, it is whether and how this interest can evolve from discreet support to national policy in the face of determined opposition from Beijing.

Japan's soft rejection of Tsai's dialogue request was a move intended to keep Tokyo's options open, while avoiding embarrassment for Taipei. However, ever-rising aggressions from Beijing could lead to a growing openness in Tokyo to some sort of security cooperation akin to the TRA. Moreover, the increasing prominence of Japanese public officials calling for precisely such an agreement indicates growing support for the idea in Japanese domestic politics.

A Basic Law for Japan-Taiwan Relations

Consistent with the broader logic of networking, the political drivers for adopting a Basic Law for Japan-Taiwan Relations have been overwhelmingly focused on forming a geopolitical coalition able to resist the growing political and military influence of the PRC. Three Japanese public figures have emerged as strong proponents of enhanced Japan-Taiwan security ties: Takei Tomohisa, Suzuki Keisuke, and Nagashima Akihisa.

In 2018, retired Admiral Takei Tomohisa, a former Chief of Staff of Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) and a longtime observer of Chinese advances in naval power, began advocating for establishing formal communication mechanisms between the Japanese MSDF and Taiwan's naval forces in order to "resist" expanding PRC military power and its potential to "change the status quo in the region" ([Epoch Times](#), May 3, 2018; [The Japan Times](#), July 30, 2015). Takei compared this proposed mechanism to the emergency communication system in place between Japan and the PRC to avoid accidental collisions and escalations between Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The Sino-Japanese variant was established to alleviate tensions resulting from PLA jets approaching Japan-claimed airspace and SDF jets scrambling to intercept; by contrast, a similar mechanism linking the SDF and Taiwan's military would be a transparent networking of regional militaries balancing against the PLA ([Mainichi](#), June 8, 2018; [Asahi Shimbun](#), June 8, 2018).

Suzuki Keisuke, a member of PM Abe's Liberal Democratic Party and Ranking Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the House of Representatives, has similarly raised the specter of the PLA to urge formal Japan-Taiwan security cooperation ([Suzuki Keisuke](#), undated). Since 2016, Suzuki has repeatedly emphasized the threat posed by a modernizing and increasingly aggressive PLA—and by extension, the need for Japan to take measures to form a military coalition able to check PLA expansion ([Japan Times](#),

December 14, 2016). Suzuki has also identified Chinese Communist Party (CCP) influence in Taiwan's democracy as a critical national security threat for Japan. Pointing to the slow erosion of democratic norms and civil rights in Hong Kong, and concerned that similar developments in Taipei could presage an adverse security environment for Japan, Suzuki has repeatedly but cautiously advocated for a Japanese version of the TRA to secure Taiwan's political independence ([Epoch Times](#), April 19; [Epoch Times](#), April 20; [The Japan Times](#), December 14, 2016). This year, Suzuki publicly hinted at the possibility that he would draft a Japanese TRA bill for introduction in the Diet ([Liberty Times](#), April 19; [Taiwan News](#), April 19).



Image: A delegation of parliamentary representatives from Japan's Liberal Democratic Party—to include Suzuki Keisuke (center, fifth from left), an outspoken advocate of closer Japan-Taiwan ties—meets with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-Wen in 2018. (Source: [Taiwan News](#))

Nagashima Akihisa, an independent member of the House of Representatives and a longtime fixture of the Japanese foreign policy community, has long supported increasing Taiwan military capabilities in order to place a check on the PLA ([Nagashima Akihisa](#), undated). Nagashima has advocated for a Taiwan military buildup, as well as closer military coordination between Taiwan and American allies in the Western Pacific ([Taipei Times](#), September 17, 2017). Nagashima is also a fixture at the newly-formed Japan-US-Taiwan Relations Institute (JUST), which advocates for Taiwan's inclusion in multilateral humanitarian assistance and disaster relief partnerships, as well as in a possible Oceanic Security Alliance (*Haiyang Anbao Lianmeng 海洋安保聯盟*) ([Central News Agency](#) (Taiwan), December 3, 2018). Though Nagashima and JUST have distinctly multilateral visions for Taiwan's international presence beyond the Japan-Taiwan bilateral relationship, both champion a Basic Law for Japan-Taiwan Relations as an initial effort.

Conclusions

While it remains unclear whether passage of a Basic Law or any comparable corollary for the TRA is viable in Japan, there exists growing support for increased Japan-Taiwan engagement. Divergent agendas related to Taiwan cover a broad spectrum: ranging from a proposed bilateral relationship, to strict military-to-military agreements, to a Japanese TRA, to Taiwan's integration into a formal security alliance. However, all of these approaches share common assumptions: that the PLA is a rising military threat; that Japan must act to form a coalition counterbalancing the PLA; and that Taiwan is a critical potential partner in this effort.

Formally engaging Taiwan in naval affairs would be a daring gambit: joint Japan-Taiwan maritime cooperation could geographically constrain Chinese power projection within the First Island Chain and facilitate joint operations necessary for an archipelagic sea denial strategy, but it is also certain to significantly increase tensions with Beijing and to precipitate an escalation in current cost-imposition pressures ([Taipei Times](#), September 17, 2017; [CSBA](#), February 15, 2015). However, if Beijing maintains its current trajectory of maritime aggression in the East China Sea, it may drive Tokyo toward further “networking” with Taiwan.

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Notes

[1] Wang Dong, “Two Asias? China’s Rise, Dual Structure, and the Alliance System in East Asia” in *Strategic Adjustment and the Rise of China: Power and Politics in East Asia* eds. Robert S. Ross & Oystein Tunsjo. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017) pp. 101.

[2] The Trump Administration and 116th Congress have reinforced U.S. commitments to Taiwan’s security with a new round of arms sales and partial passage of the Taiwan Assurance Act—actions that signal Taiwan’s status as a strategic partner to the United States, and one with whom Japan might pursue closer ties ([SCMP](#), April 16; [Taipei Times](#), May 9). The *Taiwan Assurance Act of 2019* was passed in the U.S. House of Representatives on May 7, 2019, but has not received a vote in the U.S. Senate. See: *House Resolution 2002—Taiwan Assurance Act of 2019*, [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2002).
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2002>.
